

Joliet Junior College

Oral History Program

John B. Darin

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

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10/9/75

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INTERVIEWEE: John Darin

INTERVIEWER: Tom Darin

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with John Darin for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Tom Darin at 1106 Nicholson Street, Joliet, Illinois, on October 9, 1975, at 6:00 p.m.

T. DARIN: Okay, maybe you'd like to start off telling me your name and where you were born.

J. DARIN: John Darin, John B. Darin, born in northern Italy, right up against the Austrian and the Switzerland mountains. I was five years old. My father was in America working, so he sent the money for us to come over to America. So we landed in New York, I forget the year, but we had to stay in the station all night sleeping on the benches. The next morning they stuck a green tag on us because we couldn't talk English, and they led us out to the Depot to catch the train for Lockport, Illinois. There was my father working there, on the Michigan Canal. Well, he worked there, I think, about three years and his job winded up and he went down to Coal City, Carbon Hill, and he got a job in the coal mine. Well, I was twelve years old then, when I started to work on the farm, when we moved down there. And I was working for \$10 a month. After that, two, three years I worked on the farm, I went down in the mine at fourteen years old.



T. DARIN: Could you tell me what it was like working on the farm. What did you do there?

J. DARIN: Well, we was cultivating corn, cutting hay, working in the garden, hoeing, weeding,

T. DARIN: And then you worked in the coal mine. And what was it like working in the coal mine?

J. DARIN: Well, the coal mine was a little harder work. See, the coal mine, you have six yards on each side of your road, and you have to dig the coal out of each side. And you have to build your road at the same time. You gotta take two or three feet of rock so the car and the mule can come in and pull your car out. Your coal. So, I worked there about eight years at the coal mine; so one day we had an awful storm there, a cyclone, and the storm hit the tippie and blew it all down to the ground. So, they brought in new steel to rebuild it, but they never got around to it. I don't know what happened, they just thought it just wasn't worthwhile to build it.

T. DARIN: How much did you get paid for working in the coal mines?

J. DARIN: We got paid by the ton. I think it was \$1.35 a ton at that time. And if you could load four or five tons, you were doing pretty good. So when the tippie blew down, then, we all had, all the young fellows, we had to



leave town. Go and look for work some place else.

T. DARIN: Do you remember how many people lived in Carbon Hill at the time? Was it a bigger town?

J. DARIN: Oh, at that time, there was quite a few people. I imagine there was about 2500 people.

T. DARIN: And they all moved out when they closed the mines?

J. DARIN: Not all of them. The old people stayed there. Just the young fellows moved out. Of course, there was other mines around there.

J. DARIN: A lot of people went down to Cherry, Oglesby, South Wilmington, Morris, different town where there was mines.

T. DARIN: As they closed up, they moved to different ones, right?

J. DARIN: As the mines were worked out, why they just moved out. I came to Joliet here and started to work in the steel mills.

T. DARIN: Was it -- when you worked in the coal mines, you remember any certain stories there, or any disasters or anything like that that ever happened?

J. DARIN: Yeah, my brother had a leg crashed. He had to cut it off. He was riding in front of a car when it was going downhill toward the main line. We had to push it out to the





main line so the driver could pick it up, and he got his leg caught under the car and just.....

T. DARIN: Okay. After you worked in the coal mines then, what other jobs did you have?

J. DARIN: Well, I worked in the steel mill. For about eight years, I think. And then, from there, we had a strike in 1919 and they wanted me to stay in there, to sleep and eat in there, see, and I didn't want it, so I went out. And after the strike, why they wouldn't take me back so I went out to the coke ovens, and stayed there.

T. DARIN: What did you do there?

J. DARIN: I worked in what they called the ammonia house. It's some kind of a fertilizer. Well, I stayed there, I think, a couple of years and I moved over into the benzo plant where they make motor fuel, benzo motor fuel and two or three different kinds of by-products. And then once in a while, why they'd shut down. The last time they shut down was 1936, and we was off, I think we was off six years.

T. DARIN: Was this place in Lockport? Did you say?

J. DARIN: Yeah, the coke ovens.

T. DARIN: Do you remember how much you got paid there?

J. DARIN: Well, I just don't remember how we started out





there. I think around \$3.50 a day. That was ten hours. Well, I worked there not till 1954. When I was 65 years old, and they pensioned me off. Let me go.

T. DARIN: Okay. And going back to when you were younger, could you remember some of the stuff you did for recreation?

J. DARIN: Well, we played soccer down there, that is after work. We'd go up in the park and play there, a bunch of us young fellows.

T. DARIN: What was the name of the team?

J. DARIN: We didn't have no name. But the main one was . . .

The Carbon Hill's Okays, yes that was professionals. We were just amatuers.

T. DARIN: Is there any other sports that you played?

J. DARIN: Well, that's the only sport we played down there.

T. DARIN: How about hockey? Did you play anything in hockey?

J. DARIN: Oh, yes, we played hockey, but we called it shinny.

T. DARIN: Shinny?

J. DARIN: Shinny-on-you-own-side. We used to cut our own sticks. Go out in the woods, and get a couple of tin cans. We'd size up our team on each side. We'd play till we got tired, run home.



T. DARIN: Did you play on skates, or . . .

J. DARIN: Yeah, we had skates. Of course, they was cheap skates; they wasn't what the professionals used.

T. DARIN: Can you remember anything else you did for recreation, like picnics?

J. DARIN: We here, we had our picnic; it was a society picnic, called the White Tie. Every member had to use a white bow tie. And we used to go three or four miles out in the woods, find a nice place where there's a lot of trees, you know, and everybody'd bring their basket, food basket, and the drinks would all be out there ready for us in the morning. It'd be on Sunday. And they had a dancing platform there. Concertina, and fiddles, and the park is still there. But there's no more buildings on it.

T. DARIN: Where's that at, Carbon Hill?

J. DARIN: Right northwest of Carbon Hill. We used to have bandwagons to haul us out there. To bring others out and bring us back home. Two horses. When I was young, in my hometown, we used to have a carnival every year. We'd have big prizes, and a parade, elect a king and a queen, and parade around town. And at night, we'd always take this dummy and build -- it was made of paper, and it's stuffed with hay, straw, and we'd set it on fire. And it would make a big blaze. Everybody would get around it and have a good



time. And it would go into night, late at night when everybody would get for home.

T. DARIN: Okay, can you think of some other things, recreation things that you used to do when you were younger.

J. DARIN: Yes, now I'm going to reminisce about my boyhood. In those days we didn't have a car so we had to walk everywhere we went. In the winter we went sleigh riding with a team of horses and a load of boys and girls. We used to go out to Coal City to dances, also to Eileen one time. I remember we went to a dance, in Eileen, and on our way home, we turned to look back there where we came, and we saw a light in the sky and said, "Oh, the sun is coming up." The next day, the next morning, we learned that the hall had burned to the ground. We all used to walk about two miles every night to Coal City to see the Santa Fe train come in to the depot to see who got off and on, and we also used to go to the nickle show. To the movie. And to the Opera House to see stage shows, ice-skating in the canal; we had a large park in the Carbon Hill area. All the boys would meet there every night and we would tell about what we wanted to play later. When I grew up we went to Mark, Illinois to play soccer with the team from Mark, Illinois. I remember we were about a dozen of us that went. When we got there, it snowed about two feet so we played in the snow. We had to ride the freight train to get there.







We would stay there about a week. Then the team from there would come to Carbon Hill and stay a week and play with us. Also we went to the Mazon Creek to camp. It was a lot of fun.

T. DARIN: Okay. Can you remember anything you did on holidays?

J. DARIN: Well, Columbus Day. We had a parade to downtown. March up to the hall. And there we'd get ready for the big dance in the evening. We'd have eats, drinks, and dancing after -- till after late hours.

T. DARIN: Any other holidays, like Halloween?

J. DARIN: Oh, Halloween.. A bunch of us young lads, why we'd go down, start out and go out and dump over the johns. In the backyard. And in one of those johns, there was a man in it, (Laughter) And he came out of there yelling, and we all started to run. And I don't know how he ever come out of that.

T. DARIN: Didn't you get caught?

J. DARIN: No, none of us got caught. And we used to take buggies and carts and haul them maybe two or three streets away from where they belonged. Oh, we had a lot of mean tricks them days.

T. DARIN: Did they go trick or treating like they do now?



J. DARIN: Yeah, we had our trick or treat. Tick-tack, till the people'd come out and chase us and we'd run.

T. DARIN: What was tick-tack?

J. DARIN: It was something we'd scrape down the siding, and it'd make an awful racket.

T. DARIN: How about any other holidays like Christmas -- was that celebrated just like it is now?

J. DARIN: Most likely, yeah, we had our little Christmas parties. We hung up our stockin's. Of course, we didn't get very much in them. Maybe an apple or an orange. A few cheap candies. Otherwise we didn't get much more.

T. DARIN: Can you remember much about going to school?

J. DARIN: Yes. I went to school. I went up to the sixth grade. And I had to -- The schoolhouse was two-story. It had four rooms, two downstairs and two upstairs. And I went up to sixth grade; finally I had to quit school to go to work when my father.....

T. DARIN: Do you remember any of the different subjects they taught or what was the school like?

J. DARIN: Well, we had a, we had three women teachers, one principal, a man.



T. DARIN: Was it a long way to walk to school?

J. DARIN: No.

T. DARIN: It was close?

J. DARIN: Well, from where we lived, I'd say, we had about a half a mile to walk. Some of those farm boys and girls had to walk miles to go to Carbon Hill School.

T. DARIN: Can you remember riding in horse and buggies before they had cars?

J. DARIN: Yeah, we used to take buggy rides. That's the only transportation we had to go different towns like South Wilmington, Gardner.

T. DARIN: Did you go to Joliet much?

J. DARIN: Not with the horse and buggy.

T. DARIN: How'd you get there?

J. DARIN: We'd take the train. Walk down to Coal City and get the Santa Fe train to Joliet. And we'd stay until evening and then we'd go back home.

T. DARIN: Can you remember much about Joliet? Was it a very big city back then, or what was the town like?

J. DARIN: Well, it was a big city, it had streetcars; you could go any place in town, by streetcar.





T. DARIN: Did you mostly come to shop?

J. DARIN: Yeah, a lot of times we come to shop. Buy clothes.

T. DARIN: Did you ever go up to Chicago?

J. DARIN: I don't remember going to Chicago.

T. DARIN: Can you remember anything about the Depression?

J. DARIN: Yes. It was the six years I worked out at the Park Board. And we cleaned up all the dead trees, cut them down, and sawed them up for firewood for the cook cans out there. And I worked out there about three years. It was good work, healthy, fresh air, and we made our own dinner out there, Mulligan (stew) every day.

T. DARIN: What's Mulligan?

J. DARIN: Stew.

T. DARIN: Mulligan Stew.

J. DARIN: Stew, Mulligan.

T. DARIN: How much did they pay you for working there?

J. DARIN: I think it was around \$43 a week.

T. DARIN: And what was some of the jobs that you did?

J. DARIN: For two weeks I think that it was. (The pay)  
I worked on the flowing well. We built the wall around





it. It was good, fresh water, from Lake Michigan. Flowed right down into the well.

T. DARIN: What else? Did you help make roads there, too?

J. DARIN: And we cleared up brush. And made roads, paths, repaired roads, cleared out that small creek out there, and a lot of little things like that. And over at the greenhouse, we worked.

T. DARIN: Is there anything else you can remember about the Depression?

J. DARIN: Yes, I remember when the stock market went broke, the banks all closed up, and there wasn't no more work for anybody. You couldn't buy a job. And then the Depression came, and we lost all our money -- in the banks.

T. DARIN: Do you remember Prohibition?

J. DARIN: And Prohibition came. And you could buy only near-beer, what they called two percent alcohol, but the taverns was still selling the high liquor; moonshine was brought in from the moonshiners.

T. DARIN: Was that how you were able to get the liquor?

J. DARIN: That's how you could buy it, yes. If you wanted to pay the price.

T. DARIN: Did a lot of people make it for themselves?



J. DARIN: Yeah, there was quite a few of them. So we made our own beer, rootbeer. I can remember when we worked in the coal mine. When the mine closed down, went on strike. So the men.....were fighting for the union, but the company didn't want no union. So they went down South and came up with about 250 slaves. And put them in a closed-in place down there and built them a place to sleep, and fed them, and they had a big fence built around the place, where they couldn't come out or go in, and they brought them down there to work in the coal mines. So the'd break up the union.

T. DARIN: Did they pay them a lot?

J. DARIN: They paid them very little money and what money they spent, they had to trade in the company store.

T. DARIN: The name "slaves", is that just a name you gave to them?

J. DARIN: I don't know, or remember how much they were paid, but it was very little money. Afterwards, the company recognized the union, and then they all had to leave again. And the miners, the union miners went back to work.

T. DARIN: Was this close to the Depression time, or around just before it, or.....

J. DARIN: It was before the Depression, long before.

T. DARIN: Do you remember the first car you had?



J. DARIN: Well, I didn't have a car, but my brother-in-law had a car, a Model-T Ford. One of the first cars in Carbon Hill. We drove all over with that car. And it had leather curtains on each side so when it started to rain, you had to stop the car and go outside to put the curtains on. We went all over with that car.

T. DARIN: Do you remember about what year that was?

J. DARIN: Well, that must've been 1916, somewhere around there.

T. DARIN: Wasn't that around when you got married?

J. DARIN: We got married in 1913.

T. DARIN: And can you remember anything else, like maybe the first telephone?

J. DARIN: Well, yes, we had the telephone. There wasn't very many telephones in Carbon Hill at that time, only the business places. You had to crank them to get a call and each party had different rings. That's how they communicated at that time.

T. DARIN: Can you remember maybe the first radio?

J. DARIN: I remember the first radio. My father-in-law had it down in Carbon Hill. It was a small radio, a table radio model; we used to listen to WLS, the news, and the farm news, and the barn dance, and the weather. And that's





about the only radio that I knew was down there in that town.

T. DARIN: That's a station that's still around today, too.

J. DARIN: And that's the station, WLS, that's still on today.

T. DARIN: How long did you live down in Carbon Hill?

J. DARIN: I lived there about -- oh, I'd say about 24 years, 23 years, something like that. After we got married, we moved up to Joliet here.

T. DARIN: What year was that?

J. DARIN: That was in 1913. And I went to work out in the steel mill, and then after that, I went up to the coke plant and worked there until I retired in 1954. And now I had my 86th birthday a few days ago, and I've enjoyed life, and now I'm taking it easy.

T. DARIN: Thanks so much for sharing some of your memories with me. It's been real nice talking with you.



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